

Newport County Unified High School  
Exploratory Committee  
Minutes

6:00 -7:15 PM – Tuesday June 17, 2014 – Newport Public Library

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### **Attendees**

**Present:** **Barbara A. VonVillas**, Middletown Town Council, Chair; **Justin S. McLaughlin**, Newport City Council, Vice Chair; **Richard P. Adams**, Middletown Town Council; **Marco T. Camacho**, Newport City Council; **Kellie E. DiPalma**, Middletown School Committee; **Sandra J. Flowers**, Newport School Committee; ; **Robert B. Power**, Newport School Committee;

**Not Present:** **William R. O’Connell**, Middletown School Committee; **Naomi L. Neville**, Newport City Council

### **Approval of Minutes**

The minutes of May 29, 2014 were reviewed and unanimously approved.

### **Discussion**

#### *Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) Draft*

The Committee reviewed the Frequently Asked Questions to be distributed at the public forum sponsored by the League of Women Voters on June 23<sup>rd</sup>. The FAQ were approved for distribution at the forum.

#### *League of Women Voters Public Forum*

The Committee held a general discussion on the format, arrangements and material to be distributed at the League of Women Voters forum. It was agreed that the Committee would be seated at a table on the CCRI Newport auditorium stage and the moderator, Patty Macleish would direct questions to the Committee members as appropriate.

The Agenda for the forum is as follows:

- Opening Remarks by Patty MacLeish, Moderator, League of Women Voters of Newport County
- Introductory Presentation, by Richard Adams, Member Middletown Council and Exploratory Committee
- Questions and Comments (Suggested subject areas):
- Structure, Governance, Administration and Staffing
- Academic Programs
- Funding and Budget Approvals
- School Life
- Other
- Roadmap and Wrap-up

The Committee reviewed and provided comments on the draft presentation. Mr. Adams will incorporate the suggested changes and provide a copy to Committee members prior to the forum.

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***Public Information***

A brief discussion was held on the process and possibilities for developing a public information program prior to the November election. Mr. Adams indicated that he was discussing such a program with non-profit, non-advocacy organizations which might be interested in sponsoring a program of public information.

***High School Electives for Career-Technical Training***

Ms. VonVillas provided a brief description of a CCRI program which offers courses of instruction in manufacturing technology. In addition to numerous course offerings related to manufacturing, the program offers a free manufacturing skill “Boot Camp” to introduce students to the basic skills and knowledge needed for employment in the modern manufacturing industry.

Ms. VonVillas commented that this program is the sort of career-technical education that is needed in Rhode Island and could be offered in partnership with CCRI by a high school of sufficient size.

**Attachments**

CCRI Boot Camp

Newspaper coverage following June 17, 2014 meeting is attached.

**Proposed Meetings Calendar**

The next meeting is the LWV sponsored forum at CCRI Newport on June 23<sup>rd</sup> at 7:00 PM.

The following meeting is scheduled to be held at the Middletown Public Library on Wednesday, July 2, 2014 at 6:00 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,



Richard Adams

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## Manufacturing Skills “Boot Camp”

A **FREE** seven-week course offered by CCRI's Engineering and Technology Department

### General information

**Prerequisites:** Potential students must be able to read and write at an eighth-grade level and perform basic arithmetic operations.

**Course description:** This course will introduce students to the basic skills and knowledge needed for employment in the modern manufacturing industry. It will cover basic hand tools, introductory shop math, blueprint reading, measurements and an introduction to basic machining. A fabrication project will be used to integrate the various skills and knowledge learned. By the end of the class, students will know what advanced manufacturing is about, what skills are needed to succeed and the employment opportunities available in advanced manufacturing.

**Course hours:** Classes will be held every Monday, Wednesday and Thursday for seven weeks. Each three-hour class will include one hour of lecture and two hours of laboratory exercises. In the labs, students will develop basic skills needed for employment and future study. There also will be opportunities for students to discuss job opportunities with industry representatives.

**Cost:** Generous support from the Governor's Workforce Board, Polaris MEP (formerly RIMES) and the Rhode Island Manufacturers Association (RIMA) allows CCRI to offer this class at no cost to students.



### Course objectives

Students shall demonstrate the ability to:

1. Safely use hand tools and powered machines.
2. Document procedures, tool use and project steps with an engineering journal.
3. Work with and interpret blueprints.
4. Plan a project and organize the needed tasks.
5. Determine the appropriate tools or machining processes.
6. Use various measurement tools.
7. Perform basic fractional, geometric and trigonometric calculations.
8. Perform basic drill press, lathe and vertical mill operations.
9. Freehand sketch a mechanical component or fixture.
10. Use basic SolidWorks software commands and procedures.

[www.ccri.edu/engt](http://www.ccri.edu/engt)



This program is sponsored in part by a U.S. Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration TAACCCT grant.



COMMUNITY COLLEGE OF RHODE ISLAND



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## Manufacturing jobs

The goal of this course and several of CCRI's Engineering and Technology programs is to prepare you for jobs in the manufacturing industry. Examples of jobs a student would be prepared for after completing this class include, but are not limited to:

- Apprentice machinist
- CNC machine operator
- Lathe operator I
- Milling machine operator I
- Machine maintenance technician I
- Manufacturing technician
- Tool and die apprentice
- Machine tool cutting operator

## Grades

Grading is optional. If a student chooses to be graded and achieves a "C+" or greater, credits could be awarded at a later date. For those who choose to receive a grade, grading will be based on the following:

Skill demonstrations	30 percent
Take-home assignments	20 percent
Fabrication project	50 percent

## For more information contact:

### Jaime Nash

Director of Training and Development  
CCRI's Center for Workforce and Community Education  
401-333-7070  
jnash@ccri.edu

### Christopher Matteson

Rhode Island Manufacturers Association  
Manager, Workforce and Career Development  
401-345-5695  
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### Jerry Bernardini

Chairman, CCRI Engineering and Technology Department  
401-825-1189  
jbernardini@ccri.edu

Space is limited. Seats will be assigned on a first-come, first-served basis.



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## *Newport Daily News*

June 17, 2014

### UNIFIED SCHOOL TALKS

#### **Council majority fights off attempt to remove question from the ballot**

**By Matt Sheley**

Staff writer

MIDDLETOWN — Holding a copy of the June 10 front page of The Daily News with the headline “Middletown High School earns the highest point total on island,” Middletown Town Councilman Paul M. Rodrigues questioned Monday night whether the community is on the right path talking about joining high schools with Newport.

Saying they were not aiming to bash the City-by-the-Sea or Rogers High School, Rodrigues and his colleagues Vice President Robert J. Sylvia and M. Theresa Santos said Middletown High was on a roll and they wanted to keep the momentum going. The same state education department survey had Rogers on “warning” status based on a myriad of statistics.

During the council’s meeting at Town Hall, the trio revisited the idea of pulling the plug on the ongoing unification talks, but President Christopher T. Semonelli and council members Richard P. Adams, Bruce J. Long and Barbara VonVillas weren’t buying. The four voted against a motion from Sylvia to rescind placing a nonbinding ballot question on the Election Day ballot.

“Competition is a good thing in athletics, where contests are based on an equal playing field; it’s not as fair in regards to academics, where conditions such as median family income or ethnic populations make a difference,” VonVillas said. “For example, there were 15 high schools designated as ‘commended’ (in a recent state education survey). All but two are in the suburbs.”

“With regards to the question, I think the voters deserve their opportunity to set a direction for the council and the School Committee going forward,” Semonelli said.

In response, Rodrigues, Santos and Sylvia said the timing wasn’t right to unify the high schools, particularly given the success of Middletown High.

“It just made me extremely proud of being a Middletown (resident) and graduating from that high school and all the work that goes into it,” Rodrigues said. “It doesn’t happen overnight and it’s not to bash Newport. When you read the paper and you see the facts and these are facts. It’s not my opinion.”

“I just don’t understand how anybody could be in favor of it, with the information that we have,” Sylvia said. “We know the situations of both communities and we know by joining both communities, it cannot be beneficial to the town of Middletown. It’s as simple as that.”

Newport and Middletown officials have been meeting since January to talk about merging high schools to save money and offer better educational opportunities for students.

At its last meeting, the Middletown council voted 4-3 to place the question on the Nov. 4 ballot.

Long — the swing vote in those 4-3 tallies — told the audience that if the formal decision on whether to move forward with unification were to be made today, he would be against it. And Long said he would also be voting against the nonbinding ballot question on Election Day, but that isn’t the point.

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"Let's ask about (voters') feelings," Long said. "It's not going to be binding any action the council will take. Council will take the action that's appropriate for the benefit of Middletown students first, Middletown administration and teachers and Middletown taxpayers. This council will look out for Middletown. That's our primary job."

The Newport County Unified High School Exploratory Committee is slated to meet tonight at 5:30 in the Newport Public Library to discuss what's next with the group's efforts. The organization has planned an informational forum sponsored by the League of Women Voters for Monday, June 23, at 7 p.m. at the Community College of Rhode Island campus for people to learn more about the effort.

## *Newport Daily News*

June 18, 2014

### UNIFIED SCHOOL TALKS

#### **Exploratory panel prepares for public forum**

**By Matt Sheley**

NEWPORT — As an effort to unify high schools in Newport and Middletown continues, one of the main criticisms is there haven't been enough facts presented.

The Newport County Unified High School Exploratory Committee is hoping to change that with an informational forum on Monday at 7 p.m. at the Newport campus of the Community College of Rhode Island on John H. Chafee Boulevard. The forum is coordinated through the League of Women Voters, with league member Patty MacLeish as moderator.

During a meeting Tuesday night at the Newport Public Library, exploratory committee members said they wouldn't have all the answers. But they said the forum should clear up some of the common misconceptions and lay out some of the options available if both communities approve a nonbinding question on Election Day to pursue a joint high school.

"We're not talking about getting married," committee member and Newport City Councilman Justin S. McLaughlin said. "We're talking about getting engaged."

"We may not have all the facts, but this is what we know right now," Middletown Town Councilman Richard P. Adams said. "It will be good to get this information out there."

Going back to last summer, the Middletown council members Adams and Barbara A. VonVillas have talked about merging schools with other communities to provide a better education for every student while saving money. Only Newport expressed interest.

The exploratory committee has met since the beginning of the year, trying to work out how to best approach the complicated, controversial idea of joining high schools.

After stops and starts, the committee agreed the best course was to back away from advocating for a particular plan, but show the different ideas that are possible and why they could work.

"We purposely pulled ourselves back from the details because it was going to get us in trouble without knowing how it was going to play out, and have gone back to the larger issue of, 'Do you want us to explore a joint high school?'" Newport School Committee member Robert B. Power said. "If people say 'Yes,' then we can go and push that further."

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At the same time, VonVillas said that during the group's six-plus months of work, a bunch of information has been gathered and those details should be shared. Data about student counts, the impacts of loss of staffing, and how a unified high school might be run and administered are among the items that could be addressed.

"Throughout the process, we've had a lot of questions and statements that we haven't been giving any information," VonVillas said. "I think the fact that we're providing information, people will not necessarily come to complain so much as they will come to find out what's going on, maybe with a 'prove it to me' perspective."

In preparation for the forum, the committee tweaked a computer slide show presentation and the language in a handout that would be provided to those in attendance.

All the committee's meetings have been open to the public, but have been sparsely attended.

Like others at Tuesday's meeting, Middletown School Committee Vice Chairwoman Kellie DiPalma said it would be interesting to see the turnout for the informational forum. Reminding people it was the potential start of the process, DiPalma said there still need to be binding referenda approved in both communities and other steps in order for any partnership to move forward.

"If you say 'Yes' now, that doesn't mean it's happening a year from now or it's guaranteed that will be your last chance to answer it," DiPalma said. "You're going to have another opportunity to come up with a plan."

"The question at the end of the day isn't we're arranging this marriage right now and you're going to love it and you're going to live happily ever after," Newport City Councilman Marco T. Camacho added. "It's nonbinding."

## *Newport Daily News*

June 21-22, 2014

### **READERS' LETTERS**

#### **School performance rankings should be put in perspective**

Congratulations to the 15 high schools, including the four regionals, for the state Department of Education performance ranking of "Commended." It is nice to be recognized for good work.

I wish I could say I liked the idea of rankings. Rankings create competitors. In athletics, that's a good thing, where contests are based on an equal playing field; it's not as appropriate in academics, where median family income or ethnic classifications make a difference.

For example, 15 high schools were "Commended." All but two are suburban, with fewer poor people and minorities, while those ranked "Typical" or "Warning" are mostly urban — not really an equal playing field.

What do the rankings actually prove? Does it matter that the highest scorer is Classical High School in Providence? Or that Middletown High School is in the middle at 8 of 15? Or that Portsmouth High School is tied for 15th?

However, it does matter to me that all four regional high schools were Commended (Bristol-Warren ranked fourth), proving that "Commended" is relative to who is looking.

So what does it say about the primarily urban schools that were not Commended? It does not tell me that they do not have high-achieving students or that they do not have good teachers or that they are not doing their best to provide a quality education. It just tells me that they have a harder job.

The higher-achieving Middletown students are not any smarter than the higherachieving students at Rogers



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High School or at Portsmouth or any other school in the state. But the playing field is not level.

It may be harder to test each student against himself or herself, but that is what we should be doing, not making the ranking of schools a competitive sport. Schools should be judged according to the progress of their individual students. Wouldn't it be more accurate — and more meaningful — to compare current scores of students with the scores of those same students from previous years and report that growth? That's closer to a level playing field and would be more valid in identifying real progress and achievement.

For those for whom it makes a difference, Gaudet Middle School, Thompson Middle School and Portsmouth Middle School were all ranked as "Typical," but Thompson had the highest point value. What does that mean? Overall, nothing — at least, not to me.

Nevertheless, congratulations are in order. We do our best to provide quality education in Middletown. It's nice to be recognized for doing the best we can with what we have. We just need to understand that such recognition doesn't mean we are any better or worse than others — only that we ourselves are doing a commendable job.

**Barbara A. VonVillas,**  
Middletown

*The writer is a Middletown Town Council member and Newport County Unified High School Exploratory Committee member.*